

1984 George Orwell

Halessa Fabiane REGIS*

Resumo: Esta resenha traz o mundo utópico negativo que George Orwell criou no ano de 1948, quando escreveu o livro chamado *1984*. O livro conta com o protagonista Winston Smith para guiar os leitores pelas páginas de alegria e sofrimento. Ele tenta guiar as pessoas para a compreensão dos poderes por trás de um ideal político, como também pode servir como uma inspiração para que as pessoas lutem por seus direitos humanos. Esta resenha foi escrita depois de feitas leituras do livro, reflexões sobre o ser humano e analogias entre sistemas, logo, levanta questões sobre a caracterização dos seres humanos. Por exemplo, os seres humanos são fracos? As pessoas conseguem suportar o poder e uma forte ideologia? As pessoas podem superar novos 'Big Brothers'? Se sim, por quanto tempo ou o que poderia ser o custo disso? Muitas perguntas ainda precisam ser respondidas, embora o livro mostre sugestões, é difícil entendê-las como a única verdade sobre a natureza humana em relação ao poder e tecnologia. Nesta resenha há uma introdução, as partes detalhadas do livro *1984*, capítulo por capítulo e as reflexões finais.

Palavras-chave: 1984. George Orwell. Resenha. Big Brother

Abstract: This review brings the negative utopian world that George Orwell created in 1948 when he wrote the book called *1984*. The book counts on the protagonist Winston Smith to guide readers through the pages of joy and suffering. It has tried to guide people to the full understanding of the hidden powers within a specific political view as well as to serve as an inspiration for them to be better prepared to stand for their human rights when needed. This review was written after all the readings, reflections on the human nature and analogies between systems and thus raises questions about the characterization of human beings. For instance, are human beings weak? Can people stand power and a strong ideology? Can people stand new Big Brothers? If so, for how long or what could be the cost of it? Many questions are still to be answered, although the book shows suggestions, it is difficult to understand them as the only truth about human nature in relation to power and technology. In this review there is an introduction, the detailed parts of the book *1984*, chapter by chapter and the final reflections.

Keywords: 1984. George Orwell. Review. Big Brother.

1. Introdução

As Eric Fromm wrote, “books like Orwell’s are powerful warnings”, warnings towards the lack of individuality, freedom, and the negative impact of the downpour of automaticity, sameness, money as absolute power, and total control by the party through members and media. George Orwell, which was the pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950), was born in Bengal and earned his living with his political writings, always very

* Acadêmica do curso de Letras Inglês e Literaturas da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Contato: lessaregis@hotmail.com

attentive to his own times. He is the writer of *1984*, one of the most read books in history. With this book, he wanted to alert people of the injustice and power of the political parties throughout those pages of prophecy, as some critical reviewers would call it. While the party showed a positive version of facts, Orwell brought the intelligent and sentimental Winston (the protagonist) to show the other side of the coin, to show that things were not always as great as the party would claim. He wanted to show that people would not be happy deep inside if governed by such enemies. Orwell wrote in a way that readers could understand Winston profoundly, a courageous human being depicted by him. Orwell was completely against the totalitarianism and believed in the democratic socialism. He even considered himself a socialist. He was afraid of what was going to happen to the world in the future, so, in 1984 he talked about the past, present, and future trying to compare present and past and warning people for the near future. He declared in those lines that with the money and political power, the party could do anything as to punish, to change the past to better fit the future of the party, to kill etc. The imagined world of Orwell has 3 states: Oceania (British Islands, America, and Australia), Eurasia (Europe and Russia) and Eastasia: (what is left of the world after WW2). The book has 297 pages of incredible dystopian fiction that holds us from the beginning to the end, 08 pages of Appendix talking about The Principles of Newspeak, and 07 more pages of afterword from Eric Fromm.

2. Estrutura

The book is divided in three parts, the first one has 8 chapters; the second part presents 10 chapters and the third part has 6 chapters.

The first chapter of the first part starts by introducing the protagonist and his routine. Through the paces of Winston, we readers are introduced to the society and the ways of living of the people of Oceania, to the way they are watched by the Big Brother all the time and everywhere they go, and we also have a glimpse of what Winston thinks of it as well as of his attitude towards the party. We notice that there is no individualism within party members and people must be one hundred percent devoted to the principles of the party. In the Ministry (working place) there is the ‘Two minutes hate’, when everybody gets together in front of the ‘telescreen’ where the image of Emmanuel Goldstein (the enemy) appears on it, which makes the crowd starts yelling and swearing uncontrollably at him. Winston, intimately, gets

impressed on the power they have on these people, but all and all he has to pretend to be hating the enemy altogether otherwise he can be killed for conspiracy. The party claims that everyone should be equal, but Winston is not convinced of its ways to get to equality. He wants to live his individuality, so he decides to buy a diary in an antique store in a very secret way because he knows this type of action is not allowed. The party slogans are introduced in this first chapter: WAR IS PEACE – FREEDOM IS SLAVERY – IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

In the second chapter Winston starts rebelling secretly, he writes in his diary: “Down with Big Brother”. Such an action requires courage and bravery, because he knows that the party is powerful and inquisitive, and if he is discovered he may be tortured and killed. Still, he describes his hatred in those pages, when writing his journals, sitting in a corner of the room where the ‘telescreen’ cannot have the sight of him. Also, in this chapter Orwell introduces the children as heroes, because the children work for the Thought Police (an institution that controls the thinking of people and is aimed at discovering conspiracy against the party). Even the parents are not safe if their children suspect they are not being truthful to the party. It works like a huge brainwash on the children and therefore, they behave as soldiers. Another important and main character of the story appears in this chapter when during the ‘Two minutes hate’ Winston sees a dark-haired-girl screaming at the ‘telescreen’. He thinks: ‘does everybody really think the same? Are people all blind like this? Is it real?’ The party makes sure people understand the idea that ‘thoughtcrime’ does not entail death: ‘thoughtcrime’ IS death. In the third chapter, the guilty of Winston is brought through dreams about his past and it leaves the reader with the impression of reality, so that we are always with the ‘doublethink’. The party defends that doublethink cannot exist, and that to think double is crime but Winston is the hero who goes against the party’s ideology. He has always seen two ways instead of one, as the party affirms to exist. They say doublethink is crime and people can be hurt, tortured or killed if discovered ‘doublethinking’. For that, the kids help with the discoveries throughout the story and the adults get afraid of the children. The book brings new words and a new system of language, for instance, ‘thoughtcrime’ is a new word created by the party and it’s in the ‘newspeak’ dictionary. The party summarizes the words, so people would not have a vast knowledge of words and consequently would think less elaborated thoughts. Chapter four talks about how the Record Department worked. There, Winston worked with the ‘speakwrite’, updating the past day by day. All the information that

the party thought was bad for the reputation of the own party had to be changed, the section written again, and the old piece of information forever gone. Concluding, the past was alterable when the party of the Big Brother thought it necessary. In the Fifth chapter, a friend of Winston is introduced, Syme, from the Research Department who plays a relevant role in the plot, because Winston recognizes that he is not alone in his beliefs and that Syme seems to know a lot from the parties' ideology although sometimes he seems to swallow the lies from the party. Regardless, Winston sees hope in Syme. Chapter six brings Winston going back to his diary and writing about scenes with a woman he had a relation in the past. Here the readers can notice his memory is alive and he does not want to let it go. He wants so badly keeps the past within him. What was marked in the seventh chapter was that hope lies in the 'proles' (poor people from outside the party, the proletariats). He continues writing on his diary to keep himself sane. The party slogan towards the 'proles' was: "Proles and animals are free", because for the party, they had no intelligence and were not a threat, but Winston forced himself to believe in the opposite. At the end of this chapter, the readers follow the confession of three men which goes on the 'telescreen' for everybody to watch and learn with their mistakes. Winston was always resistant to these confessions, he kept thinking about it for a long period of time, until he gets to how they did that, but why. To conclude the first part of the book, the author describes the attentiveness towards the Thought Police and the people who could be traitor and snitch. He also explains the notion of the capitalist and their top hats, i.e., the capitalism as a system. Continuing the story, Winston wanders the streets of Oceania until entering Mr Charrington antique store (the place where he bought the diary) and the old man offers to show him the room upstairs. This room becomes a very important hidden place in the story. In the room, Winston notices that there is no 'telescreen', i.e., there they were not being watched there. This chapter is also relevant for bringing O'Brien's presence into Winston's mind, making Winston think that he was not alone against the party. Winston wonders about the future, the present and the past and tries to be reasonable about his existence when the final words of the chapter come to his mind: [War is Peace – Freedom is Slavery – Ignorance is Strength].

The second part of the book has 10 chapters and it tells us about Winston and Julia's relationship. In the first chapter of the second part, Julia succeeds in delivering a message to Winston, which wrote "I love you". In spite of the hatred for the girl, firstly, Winston recognizes the truthfulness of the message and they both start a hidden affair. Then, they feel

free, safe, and courageous, and everything is renewed. The following six chapters talk about their meetings, their plans, their love, and their forced submission to the rules of Big Brother. Julia is characterized as a young woman who challenges the principles and breaks the rules. She gives Winston the braveness he needs to go on in being sane. Although Winston knows this love to be impossible, because the party does not allow love for others but for Big Brother, he dares to love her against the party's will. The second chapter describes their first meeting in the woods while the third is about their prohibited relationship and the party's influence. The fourth chapter brings Mr Charrington renting the room to Winston, so that he could meet Julia in a more cozy and safe place. Mr Charrington appeared to be to Winston a very agreeable and helpful man, keeping his old fashioned ways of living. In chapter five, Syme vanishes from existence while Winston and Julia have more encounters in the hidden room of Mr. Charrington. Still in this chapter, Winston feels that O'Brien must be an enemy of the party. And in chapter six, O'Brien gives Winston an invitation to go and visit him at home, so as to take a *newspeak* dictionary in an intriguing scene right in front of the 'telescreen'. Chapter seven describes Winston dreaming about his confusing past with his mother and sister. He remembers the suffering and hunger from childhood and the injustices made by him towards his family. Then, in chapter eight, Winston visits O'Brien and discovers that there is a hidden organization lead by O'Brien, and that the book that had been given to him is about the conspiracy instead of being a dictionary. In this book, the party's ideology is explained detailed and Winston can, finally, understand how the party works the way it does. In chapter nine, Winston read the secret book in the room and in the end of chapter ten there is a sudden turn in the story, when Winston and Julia discover that they were being monitored in the room all the time by the 'Thought Police' represented by Mr. Charrington, and the 'telescreen' hidden behind a picture on the wall. They thought: "We are the dead" while the 'proles' live freely. To explain this scene there is a phrase in the book "(...) the greater the understanding, the greater the delusion". Winston thought this was the end of everything and that they really were THE dead ones. They were caught by the Thought Police.

The beginning of part three, which introduces six chapters, describes how and where Winston was and his fear of what was about to happen to him. There, in prison, Winston heard for the first time about room 101, which became a terrifying place for him later on in the story. Room 101 was the place where his deeper changes happened, that is, mind and body changes, and there, he suffered from his "worst enemy and best friend", O'Brien. This, the

head of the Ministry of Love, where he was at, was guiding his tortures and routines of beatings, oppressions, and unbearable threats to his life. Winston continued holding up against all the suffering until he could not stand it anymore, mentally and physically exhausted, he started confessing to whatever the party wanted. The party had money and the latter technology to make a brain function well, according to them, and certainly they would not give up of a member party until the methods have succeeded. But a final question remains; did the party succeed in “cleaning” Winston’s mind? Did Winston betray Julia or the party? Can a human being forget humanity and love? Is love just in our brain? Can memories be wiped forever from our minds with the help of technology? That will be answered in the final chapter of the book for those who read it till the end.

3. Considerações

Orwell created a world in which the power of a few minority controls every detail in society, in a human mind, in a person’s actions and beliefs. This institution of power is very well organized and uses psychological and physical threats in order to achieve its objectives. It reminds the Inquisition (*Inquisitio Haereticae Pravitatis*; Inquiry on Heretical Perversity) by the Catholic Church, because there was a time when this type of threats brought by Orwell would be done in order to “establish order” in society, in a broad view. In order for this institution to have peace, others may suffer, be afraid and controlled by them. It did not matter for the institution as long as they could achieve the purposes of power and pure glory. A controlled society would have to accept whatever the big ones told them, otherwise, they would suffer harsh consequences. Unfortunately, in a smaller scale, we still deal with these conditions of power in our society, because many times we see dignity losing battles for money, in a capitalist world, even if the injustice is clearly displayed. Do we really need to behave similar as Winston nowadays? Our system is, of course, different and less cruel than the one Winston lived under, but still, this book serves right for us to think about all the injustices and the relationship people have with power and money, and about the necessity of a few to get over the rules and explore the others. Another important aspect is the fact that human beings cannot be simply dehumanized and brainwashed in order to follow rules and completely forget their own human nature of love and care. It would need years of analysis and studies to find a way of diminishing one’s individuality as well as psychological and

physical observations. That requires technology and money, and indeed, in Orwell's world, this was completely feasible. The Philosophers Ashley Montagu and Floyd W. Matson who wrote the book "The dehumanization of man" quote that

"It neither kills outright nor inflicts apparent physical harm, yet the extent of its destructive toll is already greater than that of any war (...)". The use of tortures has the power to cause an irreversible damage to the individual mind and body. Usually these institutions of power want people to be as robots, to follow orders and to not think or complaint, and if we think about some companies nowadays, we will find examples of dehumanization from the employers towards the employees, and therefore, I agree with Eric Fromm when he says that *1984* is a warning to our capitalist society, because this negative utopia can sometimes be seen in a small degree among ourselves, and it only takes someone to pay a closer attention to how things work in the capitalist world. For those who might be interested in this type of organizations and negative utopia I would advise them to also read "The handmaids' Tale", by Margaret Atwood, which also talks about a controlled society where human feelings are not important as soon as they stick to the rules, and when they start showing relentlessness they are executed the same way *1984* system does with the traitors. There are many ways of dying, and that is why we must be aware of these injustices against the human nature to not die day by day pressured by the capitalist system. Let's not be killed by a system! We must continue humans, free, and simply live!

4. Referências

Orwell, George. 1984. *New York, New York –USA*. Signet Classic (Published by New American Library, a division of Penguin Group) Inc., 1961.
Montagu, Ashley. & Matson, Floyd W. *The dehumanization of man* McGraw-Hill, New York (1983).